

Nicholas E. Lombardo, O.P. *The Father's Will. Christ's Crucifixion and the Goodness of God*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013. xii+270pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-968858-6. £65. Hbk.

Theologies of redemption, Lombardo strikingly asserts, address the question (vii), 'is God the Father with me as I take up my cross, or he is orchestrating my crucifixion?' Lombardo's project, therefore, has to do with rescuing the goodness of God from the tension in which it stands with God's apparent willing of the moral evil of the cross as the means of human redemption. His answer lies in the reinterpretation of the devil's ransom trope in patristic writing.

What we need to give an account of is the divine will with respect to Christ's crucifixion which avoids making the cross the intended means to redemption: a moral evil. Something counts as an intended means if it is as an aspect of an intention logically implied, rather than ontologically entailed, by the willed end. Moral evil is the intentional frustration of universal human natural inclinations toward human flourishing, and to which the desires arising from those inclinations bind us in moral obligation. God may be said not to will the cross as the means to our redemption if it is a foreseen consequence not logically implied by the willed end of his action.

An overview of the Gospels, Lombardo argues, demonstrates that the historical Jesus almost certainly anticipated his death as furthering his mission, and if we grant any historical accuracy to the Gospels we must grant this also. The New Testament authors also claim that the crucifixion was in some way part of God's plan with respect to Christ's mission.

Anselm's version of double-effect reasoning cannot avoid the implication that God wills the crucifixion as the means to the satisfaction of his honour; Abelard cannot account for the necessity of the cross as the mode of displaying God's love. Anselm's substitution of the Father for the Devil in the transaction pits Christ over against God in a way that threatens divine unity. A careful reconstruction of the theme of the Devil's ransom in patristic literature, however, uncovers its role as a way of displaying the wisdom of God in defeating *death* through cross and resurrection. This account does not need a literal devil nor does it accord him any rights, and the cross here is, Lombardo claims, a nonintended effect of God's will to overcome death through provoking evil: the intention is to protect humanity, which does not logically entail death.

Lombardo's reading of theological sources is careful and incisive, even if his historical argument about Jesus' attitudes is weaker than his conclusion. On his account the cross seems to be more than the nonintended consequence of provoking evil to unleash its fury on Christ rather than us, since it is the condition for the defeat of death which already grips us. So it is not clear that the ransom account fares better than Anselm in avoiding making the cross intrinsic to redemption. Nevertheless, this is an impressive and refreshing approach to the well-worn rehabilitation of the ransom trope in atonement theory.